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ABSTRACT

This document presents the case for the use of situational reinforcement (SR) as a language teaching method of which all teachers of languages should be made aware. SR is defined as a horizontal approach to language learning, a process of gradual familiarization where students are presented with a mixture of language structures from the outset; these structures are taught in natural contexts based initially on concrete classroom and social situations, the situations becoming increasingly abstract as the student progresses. The expressed theoretical basis of this approach is that people generate language based on what they already know and continually abstract and revise internalized grammar rules from the input they receive. Section one of the document describes this philosophy and the goals of SR. The second section presents the history of SR. Included in this section is a comparison of SR with the traditional "pattern practice" method of teaching language. The final section summarizes research related to SR. (JA)

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Situational Reinforcement:
Philosophy, Goals, History, and Recent Research

I. Philosophy and Goals:

Situational Reinforcement (SR®) is a language-teaching method which, like many language teaching approaches, endeavors to help people learn a language as quickly and efficiently as possible. The main difference between this approach and others is that communication is the goal of the approach and the method is communicative from the first lesson.

The SR method is a horizontal approach to language learning, a process of gradual familiarization where students are presented with a mixture of language structures from the outset. These structures are taught in natural contexts based initially on concrete classroom and social situations, the situations becoming increasingly abstract as the students progress. The structures are not presented as isolated patterns, but as sequential clusters

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of commands, questions, and answers, thus placing the learning focus on the natural language situations in which communication occurs. This presentation is much closer to the natural language situation a child or adult encounters when acquiring his own language or learning a new one in a foreign country, in that a variety of phonological (including intonational), grammatical, and lexical items are presented from the beginning.

These concepts may become clearer if we examine the goals of SR:

1) The student should be able to use the language in connected discourse.
2) He should be able to generate new sentences from the items learned, that is, create untaught utterances by combining previously learned structures and vocabulary in new ways.
3) Outside of class, he should be able to choose appropriate structures in authentic communication situations

from the material that has been presented in class.

The theoretical basis of this approach is that people generate language based on what they already know and continually abstract and revise internalized grammar rules from the input they receive.[1] Thus a person creates original sentences in his native language based on the grammar he has internalized from listening to the speakers around him. He brings this facility to a second-language learning situation where he produces sentences, also incorporating what he has learned so far of the new language. And of course, these new data complement or conflict with internalized rules of the native language. Hence, many errors of second-language learners can be predicted on the basis of their native language.

Since the student of SR is gradually polishing the language he is acquiring in a natural way, he is not expected to master a given item, such as the present tense, before going on to the

next. Because comprehension is crucial to the communicative goal of this approach, everything the student says and does must be appropriate to the situation in which he finds himself and the situation must occur naturally in real life. Lessons revolve initially around classroom situations so that the student can describe and manipulate his immediate environment by discussing what he and his classmates are doing, have done or will do. This utilization of concrete classroom objects where students describe actions everyone has witnessed is gradually enlarged to include non-immediate social and travel situations.

Since SR is situation rather than structure oriented, the structures presented are more dependent on the situation than on a structural analysis of the language. It is also true of natural language situations outside of class that language structures depend on the situation and not vice versa. Hence an optimal learning situation would be one in which students learn to say what

a given situation would naturally elicit; they would also be encouraged to offer appropriate responses drawn from their growing competence and other experiences. By stressing communication skills in a total language context, SR attempts to avoid manipulation of structures per se since the latter usually entails overlearning and automatic responses without real communication.

Here are some basic principles of SR to keep in mind:

1) The situation controls the mixture of language structures presented, not vice versa. Students should think in the language they are learning, not merely manipulate its forms.

2) Communication is always the immediate, primary, and relevant task at hand.

3) Mastery of the language is gradual with structures being continually reviewed, corrected, and reinforced in a realistic context.

4) A variant answer is acceptable if appropriate and correct.

The SR method promotes the above goals through response sequences initially between student and instructor and later between two students. The sequences elicit personal information or revolve around the performance of some action which co-occurs with the introduction of a specific unit of the sequence. After the response sequences of one section are learned, they are combined into a conversation sequence. The final goal of this procedure is to get the students to talk to each other in connected sequences with minimum instructor involvement. The presentation of each sequence will of necessity be initiated by the instructor, but the instructor should retire from dominance as soon as possible, letting the students work with the sequences themselves. Students should be encouraged to use all the intellectual resources at their disposal; if they produce alternate acceptable responses, they should be commended. Such responses indicate they both understand what is going on and have generalized these data to a wider experience.

II. History of SR.

SR was originally developed in 1967 as an alternative to existing but unsatisfactory methodologies for teaching English as a second language (ESL).

Before that time, traditional teaching had been primarily concerned with written, not spoken, language. The focus had been on formal grammatical analyses and/or translation of classical texts. Linguistic research concentrated on analyzing historical relationships between Indo-European languages or producing static descriptive grammars of non-Indo-European languages. Neither approach was concerned with language itself as a means of communication. The primary concern was with form, not function, of the language system.

U.S. involvement in World War II brought renewed interest in and forced evaluation of the status of foreign language (FL) teaching in the U. S. It was estimated that in 1928 25.2 percent of U. S.

high school students studied modern FL. By 1949 the percentage had dropped to 13.7 percent and remained there for the next six years.[2] Obviously few Americans were going overseas with the ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language. Those who had studied FL may have been able to analyze, translate, or read them but could hardly fill the urgent need for people who could speak and understand languages critical to U.S. interests.

Because of this need the Armed Forces took the initiative in developing FL materials in order to train personnel in FL speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. New teaching materials based on current linguistic theory were developed, such as those of the Intensive Language Program of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). The descriptive linguists associated with this project felt that language materials should be graded and ordered in accordance with increasing grammatical complexity (an idea highly compatible with their theoretical model), and that language should be taught in terms of patterns based on

such grading and ordering. The mastery of such patterns implied, in their opinion, the learning of the language. These ideas owed much to the behaviorist theory that language was an acquired set of habits and that all a student had to do was learn the correct response to a given stimulus. In other words, he was expected to internalize a set of habits through repetition, memorization and manipulation of sets of structurally related items. The target language was to be learned through oral, not written, practice. This method has often been called "pattern practice".

Unfortunately the FL teaching materials based on the "pattern practice" method did not differentiate between simple and complex patterns; all patterns received the same amount of attention in teaching. However, recent evidence suggests that grammatical complexity may not be a valid criterion for ordering presentation of material at all.[3] In addition, efforts to master the patterns promoted memorization (though not necessarily comprehension) of a

body of data which, although internally consistent, was often devoid of content insofar as meaningful language exchanges did not occur. No attempt was made at communication between users of the language, nor was there any guarantee that students would be able to select the appropriate structure (if they had learned it) outside of class.

The "pattern practice" methodology was not used only by military personnel, but adapted for use by public and private schools, and for the teaching of ESL as well.

In the late 1950's the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan began to develop their own materials using the "pattern practice" technique. The methodology was expanded to include variation in pattern context. Material previously studied in class was reinforced and vocabulary was expanded through use of picture charts, where students were obliged to use previously studied patterns in new situations.

The enactment of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 established new standards of oral proficiency; many foreign language teachers, trained primarily to teach reading, not oral skills, had to seek new training. The NDEA summer institutes were designed both to increase the oral skills of the teachers and to acquaint them with the new linguistically based methods described above. Since their linguistic insecurity is often high, however, teachers have tended to continue to rely on a strict interpretation of pattern drills and dialogues rather than the expansive pattern drills in situational contexts developed at Michigan.[4]

In the light of past and current research, however, it is becoming increasingly obvious that drills alone do not per se enable the foreign language student to progress from manipulation of foreign language structures to free

communication in the target language. *

Traditional foreign language teaching methods are still employed by some teachers for students not interested in developing oral skills, but many more still use "pattern practice". Although the goals of this latter method and SR are the same--free communication--their methods differ. The following comparison may be helpful:

During the late 1960's situationally-based materials were introduced into an ESL Manpower program in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. These materials formed the basis for nucleus FL and ESL courses which have been developed into the Institute of Modern Languages (IML), Washington, D. C. FL and ESL series. SR is a registered trademark of IML.

Comparison of SR and "Pattern Practice"

SR	"Pattern Practice"
1. Emphasis on language use.	1. Emphasis on language structure.
1.1 Language regarded as system of communication.	1.1 Language regarded as system of patterns.
1.2 Function of teacher is to teach students to use language in communicative context.	1.2 Function of teacher is to teach students to use patterns in correct structural context.
2. Reliance on communication exercises in situational context.	2. Reliance on manipulative grammatical exercises with assumption that master of same will lead to communication.
3. Grading & ordering of language by situation; order of presentation based on criteria of expansion (opportunity to introduce new structures & vocabulary) and abstraction (potential conceptualization of situation).	3. Grading & ordering of language by structure; order of presentation of latter based on grammatical analysis of simple to complex forms.

4. Short cycle from presentation to free expression.	4. Long cycle from presentation to free expression.
4.1 Structures are used for communication immediately after being introduced.	4.1 Structural patterns are isolated and not used for communication.
4.2 Structures are used and integrated with other previously learned patterns immediately and reviewed throughout the course.	4.2 Patterns are presented serially, not integrated into a useful (in terms of ability to communicate) mixture of structures until after many hours of instruction.
4.3 Students test classroom models as real speech through free expression immediately inside the classroom.	4.3 Students test classroom models as real speech through free expression outside the classroom, if at all.

5. Language structures presented in conversational clusters.	5. Language structures presented in isolated patterns.
5.1 Students are expected to internalize structures by recombining & expanding several patterns at a time in a given situation.	5.1 Students are expected to internalize structures by memorizing dialogues.
5.2 Several items focused at a time.	5.2 One item focused at a time.

6. Language presented as whole system.	6. Language presented as set of grammatical patterns.
6.1 Students experience language as set of component parts.	6.1 Students experience language as set of discrete elements.
6.2 Fluency dependent on mastery of integrated patterns.	6.2 Fluency dependent on mastery of isolated patterns.
7. Horizontal approach.	7. Vertical approach.
7.1 Operation dependent on principle of gradual familiarization.	7.1 Operation dependent on perfection of isolated pattern before another is presented.
7.2 Each exercise presents cross-section of structures being learned and reviewed.	7.2 Each exercise manipulates one given pattern or structure.

7.3 Patterns reviewed in different situational contexts with different sets of other patterns. Constant practice in retrieving correct pattern from those already internalized.

8. Student output innovative.

8.1 Students expected to produce utterances on basis of what they've internalized.

8.2 Students expected to modify pattern models or innovate within framework of given situation; also obliged to generate untaught utterances.

7.3 Patterns reviewed in dialogs & exercises which remain external to variation in context. No attempt made to give students a choice of retrieving correct pattern from several which may have been internalized.

8. Student output controlled.

8.1 Students expected to produce utterances consisting of memorized patterns & dialogues.

8.2 Students expected to imitate or modify pattern models only.

9. Open-ended approach to language acquisition. Teachers use variety of procedures to help students learn, including translation, grammatical explanations or other technical aids such as reading and writing where necessary.	9. Highly structured approach to language acquisition. Teachers use specific types of drills to help students learn, which are oral-aural in orientation; reading and writing are delayed until later levels. Grammatical explanations and translation are discouraged.
10. Learning presupposes correct use in open-ended situations and thus comprehension of the grammatical processes involved.	10. Learning presupposes correct use in highly structured situations which of themselves do not imply comprehension of the grammatical processes involved.
11. Subject matter highly relevant to students' interest and needs.	11. Subject matter may not be relevant to student interest and needs.

III. Research Related to SR

The earliest historical evidence of a situational method was attested in Gouin, who attempted to teach Fl through situation sequences. He tried to get students to think in a foreign language by first explaining a given sequence of actions in the students' native language, then acting out the sequence while describing it in the target language. His contributions to foreign language teaching in general and SR in particular were: introduction of motor activity into the classroom through dramatization of sentences practiced; recognition of students' need to deal with familiar, concrete experiences; and presentation of complete rather than partial sentences or phrases in lifelike situations, or "living" contexts.[5]

Jespersen was an early advocate of the "direct method" of language teaching, where mastery of grammar and vocabulary were deemed less important than learning to use the

living language.[6] Oral communication was regarded as essential towards achieving this goal, and situational contexts a natural vehicle for the method.

Billows discussed the use of patterns in context and the importance of presenting new material in familiar situations, so that students proceeded from known to unknown experiences with a minimum of confusion.[7]

Gaarder felt that teaching materials needed situational reality and that the instructor should, therefore, give students meaningful material to discuss. Gaarder incorporated into his learning model the restrictive use of "*control by the language*"...--"echoic, memorized, rote behavior"--in favor of "*control of the language*."--"recombining without a model." He was of the opinion that if students were to acquire the control that goes beyond drills, they must practice such control from the beginning of their foreign language experience.[8]

Oller and Obrecht experimented with foreign language teaching in communicative and non-communicative contexts. It was their conclusion that meaningful communicative activity greatly increased the effectiveness of a pattern drill and should be a focal part of the drill from the beginning.[9]

Upshur's experiments showed that the "internal structure underlying a set of sentences of a foreign language [was] not completely learned by presentation and practice of that set of sentences."[10] He suggested that sequential mastery of material was not necessary for learning to take place, and that most efficient learning occurred in a communicative context.

Bowen stressed the fact that communication should be the goal of classroom activities. To him, manipulative exercises seemed useful but insufficient in helping students achieve second language competence, since they needed to be able to do more than manipulate structures if they were to function adequately in real, authentic communication situations.[11]

Newmark and Reibel rejected the use of structurally graded and ordered exercises which may offer grammatically coherent but of necessity linguistically isolated material. They considered situational ordering to be preferable to the non-natural non-viable contexts of structurally graded and ordered exercises based on contrastive analyses. In their opinion, such structure drills developed to teach discrete grammatical skills lacked the situational cohesion of natural speech and were thus inherently ineffective. Newmark and Reibel pointed out that the acquisition of both one's native language and a second language occurred naturally in situationally rather than only grammatically coherent contexts.[12]

Hauptman compared structural teaching methods where materials were sequenced in order of grammatical and lexical complexity with situational material presented in meaningful dialogues which were not dependent on grammatical and lexical complexity. He concluded that the language performance of low-aptitude students taught with

a situational approach was equal to the performance of low-aptitude students taught with a structural approach and that high-aptitude students performed better with a situational approach than with a structural one.[13]

Kearny studied pattern practice and situational reinforcement techniques and concluded that the use of contexts and communciation activities would strengthen any foreign language teaching approach, and that, in addition such approaches would benefit from situational presentation.[14]

Schumann compared situational reinforcement to other teaching methods, finding that SR both provided opportunities for and encouraged students to communicate.[15]

FOOTNOTES

1. John W. Oller, "Language Use and Foreign Language Learning," *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 9 (May 1971): 166.

2. George Watts, "The Teaching of French in the United States: A History," *French Review* 37, no. 1 (October 1963): 42-43.

3. Leonard Newmark and David A. Reibel, "Necessity and Sufficiency in Language Learning," *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 6 (May 1968): 145, 149-51.

4. Mary Ann Kearny, "Pattern Practice and Situational Reinforcement in Language Teaching" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 1969), pp. 57-59.

5. Renzo Titone, *Teaching Foreign Languages: An Historical Sketch* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1968), pp. 35-36.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

7. F.L. Billows, *The Techniques of Language Teaching* (Bristol: Longmans, 1961), pp. 3-5.

8. A. Bruce Gaarder, "Beyond Grammar and Beyond Drills," *Foreign Language Annals* 1, no. 2 (December 1967): 109-10.

9. John W. Oller and Dean H. Obrecht, "Pattern Drill and Communicative Activity,"" *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 6 (May 1968): 173-4.

10. John A. Upshur, "Four Experiments on the Relation between Foreign Language Teaching and Learning," *Language Learning* 18, no. 1-2 (June 1968): 111.

11. J. Donald Bowen, "Terminal Behavior in Language Teaching," *TESOL Newsletter* 2 (January, March 1968): 19.

12. Newmark and Reibel, p. 130-1.

13. Philip C. Hauptman, "A Structural Approach vs. a Situational Approach to Foreign Language Teaching," *Language Learning* 21, no. 2 (Dec. 1971): 235-44.

14. Kearny, p. 134.

15. John Schumann, "Communication Techniques," *TESOL Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1972): 161.